

## PLANNING COMMISSION

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ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

May 16, 2013

**To: Annapolis City Council**  
**From: Planning Commission**  
**Re: Annapolis City Dock Master Plan, Resolution No. R-49-12**

### **CITY DOCK MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATION**

#### **Summary**

The City of Annapolis Comprehensive Plan of 2009, endorsed by the Planning Commission and adopted by the City Council, in accordance with the laws of the State of Maryland, provides the officially designated Comprehensive Plan currently guiding development and land uses within our City.

An important focus in the Comprehensive Plan is on the City's downtown waterfront area known as City Dock. Because the Comprehensive Plan recognized the special importance and challenges of this area, a major recommendation of the Plan was to have this key area become the focus of a detailed sector study that would make planning recommendations. That sector study, which began in 2010, is known as the City Dock Master Plan (CDMP) of 2013. This Plan was prepared over a period of three years and incorporated a high level of public participation, as well as professional input from City staff and well-qualified specialist consultants.

The CDMP was presented to the Planning Commission in February 2013 and was the subject of a public hearing on March 21, 2013. Numerous members of the public attended and spoke at the hearing. Others contributed written opinions, issues, and observations that were admitted into testimony. The Planning Commission considered all of these community inputs and conferred in open session, among themselves, and with City staff to reach its findings as set forth in this recommendation.

The Planning Commission recommends to the City Council **APPROVAL** of the City Dock Master Plan (CDMP) with the following specific amendment:

The proposed building height restrictions contained within the CDMP should be considered individually by development site. The following should apply:

Compromise Street: 2-3 stories

Upper Dock Street: 3-4 stories

Lower Dock Street (closest to Susan Campbell Park): 3-4.5 stories.

Heights should be consistent with existing building heights of approximately 3 to 4 floors and reflect patterns of existing development within the Historic District and within the City Dock study area. Additionally, revised zoning regulations are needed to change how height is measured. It should be changed to measure from grade or flood protection elevation, whichever is greater to ensure the number of allowed stories is achievable given existing federal and local floodplain regulations.

## **Process**

The Planning Commission participated in a rigorous public process for review and consideration of the proposed CDMP. On February 7, 2013, consultants presented their current and final conclusions and recommendations and the public was accorded a lengthy question and answer session. The process continued with the public hearing before the Historic Preservation Commission. The comments received by the Historic Preservation Commission were forwarded to the Planning Commission for review. As noted above, the Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on March 21, 2013. Significant written comments were received in advance of the hearing.

The Department of Planning and Zoning, doing its own analysis, reported that the CDMP meets all standards and recommended approval of the CDMP. The Planning Commission admitted the staff report of the Department of Planning and Zoning into evidence as well as all other exhibits presented. Mr. Jon Arason, Director of the Department of Planning and Zoning and Dr. Sally Nash, Chief of Comprehensive Planning, presented on behalf of the Department of Planning and Zoning. At the hearing, everyone present who wished to speak was accorded the opportunity. Deliberations occurred in public sessions on March 21, May 2, and May 16, 2013.

## **Findings**

The Planning Commission reviewed the Master Plan according to the analyses required by the Land Use Article of the Maryland Annotated Code relevant to a special exception application. This analysis focuses on the consistency of the

proposed sector plan with the Comprehensive Plan, specifically:

1. Policies
2. Timing of the implementation of the Plan
3. Timing of any private development and construction
4. Timing of any rezoning required
5. Effect on patterns of development
6. Consistency with existing and surrounding land uses
7. Densities or intensities of resulting land uses

In reviewing the City Dock Master Plan, the Planning Commission focused particularly on its consistency with the Comprehensive Plan and with the general completeness, safety and quality of the plan design. The Commission is concerned that the neighborhood character, which comprises the fundamental approach of the Comprehensive Plan, is preserved and enhanced while avoiding undue adverse impacts to the community.

### **I. Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan**

The desire to substantially improve the attractiveness and efficiency of City Dock, and thereby to improve its economic strength, has been notably present for decades. The current Comprehensive Plan of 2009 called for the current City Dock sector plan to be developed. Thus, the preparation and submission of the City Dock Master Plan (CDMP) explicitly complies with the Comprehensive Plan. We find that the consistency between the two goes further.

The Comprehensive Plan contains a policy specifically directed toward changes and improvements at City Dock. In the Plan, Policy 6 in the *Land Use and Economic Development* chapter, "Enhance the Public Realm of City Dock and its Environs," calls for a downtown that maximizes public access and especially pedestrian access to the waterfront, that incorporates a variety of large and small open spaces, accommodates boats, clears some civic spaces of parking places, and provides parking and transportation measures designed to integrate these goals as well as the economic viability of City Dock merchants.

A further policy of the Comprehensive Plan, embodied in Policy 7 and Policy 10 from the *Transportation* chapter, is to shift the City's transportation priorities away from a sole reliance on single occupant automobiles to a more balanced mix of options that also include public transit, bicycle, and pedestrian circulation. It calls for transportation solutions that remove pedestrian-auto and auto-bicycle conflicts while maintaining the existing flows of daily traffic.

We find that the City Dock Master Plan is consistent with these explicit policies of the Comprehensive Plan. The CDMP provides for enhancing the public realm of City Dock through improved pedestrian circulation by replacing Memorial Circle with a simple and safe T intersection that improves traffic flows and returns enormous public space to pedestrian use and enjoyment. Moreover, the CDMP provides for better public access to the water, improved use of public space and also appropriately adjusts the transportation balance by decreasing some automobile parking from an area of the most scenic and valuable public space on the Chesapeake Bay. The CDMP recommends specific parking management and control strategies designed to create an enjoyable public destination and increased economic activity. The CDMP is consistently designed to reach the two goals of an enjoyable public destination and a stronger business district.

The CDMP complies with other policies articulated in the Comprehensive Plan. Policy 10 in the *Land Use and Economic Development* chapter provides for the City to consider, study, and act upon the “risks from sea level rise in decisions involving land use along the waterfront.” This policy is explicitly addressed in the CDMP’s careful consideration of and plans for stormwater mitigation and floodwall development.

## **II. Timing of the Plan, Development and Rezoning**

We find that the City Dock Master Plan is consistent with the timing envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan. There is little within the CDMP that is specifically timed. Key recommendations are for measures to be considered as part of a system of larger improvement programs and that they therefore are sequenced in a way that is efficient and appropriate in improving public welfare. Examples where timing may be significant include the stormwater and flood recommendations of the CDMP. Because flooding impacts have increased notably, even since the Comprehensive Plan was adopted in 2009, the City has moved quickly to incorporate some CDMP flooding and floodwall recommendations into the upcoming Capital Improvement Program.

In addition, City staff proposes to phase in circulation and parking recommendations with an awareness of the initiative to replace/rebuild the current Hillman downtown parking garage that is also included in the upcoming Capital Improvement Program.

Finally, the CDMP not only seeks to enhance the public’s casual use and enjoyment of the waterfront but also recognizes the diverse and near-constant

use of City Dock for public and private events. The number, scheduling, and size of these events are the subject of current debate and legislative initiatives in City Council; but, in general, are an important part of life in the community. We find that the CDMP is flexible and therefore consistent with the timing of these events.

### **III. Effect on Patterns of Development and Surrounding Land Uses**

The Commission finds that the City Dock Master Plan is consistent with the surrounding areas and land uses. The CDMP calls for a mix of residential, commercial, and public uses within the study area that is very similar to the pattern of those uses that exists today. Indeed, only an accentuation of pedestrian-usability and adjustment to transportation and circulation patterns are envisioned. The intent of the recommendations is to make incremental changes that embody the policies adopted in the Comprehensive Plan.

The Commission finds that there are no additional pressures introduced by the CDMP that will affect the surrounding land uses within this downtown area. The surrounding areas are already an intensely developed area of our City. These existing buildings are tightly controlled by City law and are also highly regulated by the additional requirements of the Historic Preservation Commission. Thus, we find that the CDMP is consistent with the current land use regulation and patterns of development of the City Dock study area.

### **IV. Densities or Intensities of Resulting Land Uses**

The Commission finds that the CDMP, as amended in this recommendation, is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan in its recommendations for density and intensity of resulting land uses.

The Commission supports the recommendation of the CDMP for limited redevelopment of some vacant and underused parcels within the City Dock study area. The Commission understands the importance of these CDMP elements and supports these recommendations as a way of enhancing the area for the aesthetic and economic benefit of citizens and visitors to our City. These recommendations will serve to enhance the visual appeal of this “jewel” by framing it within a context of appropriate background structures. These new “framing developments” will serve to complete the overall picture, directing the focus to the main attractions and away from background distractions. These new structures, when developed, will provide additional activity, residents, and offices to the City Dock area—further improving its vitality and

economic base.

For example, one of the most appealing views and spaces within the City Dock area is of the Market House, as framed by the surrounding buildings of Factors Row behind it. These three- and four-story historic buildings provide a beautiful backdrop for views of the dock and the market. Moreover, the pedestrian space created between these buildings and the Market House conveys a sense of intimacy and excitement characteristic of the most successful pedestrian spaces anywhere. This is the building scale and positive environmental impact that the CDMP seeks to extend to other areas within the City Dock area.

Specifically, the Commission recommends amendments to the general language in the plan that make it more specific for each development parcel. The Compromise Street development site should be allowed 2-3 stories, the Upper Dock Street development site should be allowed 3-4 stories, and the Lower Dock Street (closest to Susan Campbell Park) development site should 3-4.5 stories. The Commission finds that the existing level of building density within the Historic District is controlled today by a set of three height districts. We recommend that the existing height district controls are adapted to account for flood protection elevation and that height be measured from either grade or flood protection elevation, whichever is greater. The only additional changes will be to shift specific parcels between height districts.

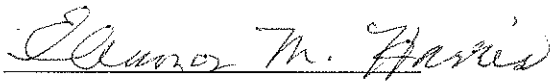
These small adjustments will allow for appropriate and desirable new development within the same height control approach that exists today. We understand that these current districts provide for a maximum height at the ridgeline of a building to be at least 3 to 4.5 floors above grade. The Commission recommends that this same approach be updated to reflect current regulations for ground floors and applied to the new buildings proposed in the CDMP.

## **Recommendation**

In summary, the goal of many Annapolitans has been for many years to return our front yard to uses that we can enjoy and that will attract visitors to a genuinely pleasant and beautiful waterfront. The Comprehensive Plan called for this goal. The City Dock Master Plan achieves this goal. The Planning Commission finds that the Master Plan is in compliance with the Comprehensive Plan and serves the public interest through enhancing the environment and stimulating the economy. The Commission recommends City Council approval of the City Dock Master Plan, as amended.

At a meeting on May 16, 2013, the Planning Commission voted <sup>5</sup>~~6~~-0 to recommend to the City Council that it approve the City Dock Master Plan as amended by the above specific conditions.

Adopted May 16, 2013:



Dr. Eleanor Harris, Chair

